



Full Court Press

September 2006

A newsletter for the employees of the Fourth Judicial District of the State of Minnesota

In This Issue: Progress

By Mark S. Thompson, District Court Administrator

A desired outcome of change is *progress*. Webster's definition of *progress* includes, "advance, to go forth, onward movement, gradual betterment." This month's issue is a sampling of national, state and district *progress*.

The September issue brings to us reflections by a former Louisiana judge about Hurricane Katrina, our national disaster, one year later. Viewing *progress* through his eyes under such challenging circumstances is nothing short of amazing. Lessons learned in this national disaster will help us progress as we critique our own emergency plans, from Homeland Security to the Pandemic Flu Planning Team.

Statewide, a new website unifies all Minnesota courts in one location via www.mncourts.gov. Uniformly we can serve citizens, parties, justice partners, and employees efficiently and effectively through technology with a click of a mouse. Within a few days of the initial switch to the new site, technical difficulties were surmounted, resulting in *progress*.

In our own shop, the Fourth Judicial District equipped children with an amazing 338 backpacks filled with supplies to start their school year completely prepared.

What a remarkable effort! As we know, education is essential in preparing children to make positive choices that prevent them from entering the doors of the Juvenile Justice Center. The reading program, *Everybody Wins!*, echoes the value of education, led by Judge Pihlaja and numerous volunteer readers.

Each year we are able to measure progress by the accomplishments recognized via the Anne V. Simonett nomination process. It is energizing to read about *progress* in our courts and community as a result of your endeavors. Selecting only one person each year is truly a difficult assignment.

I hope you will join me in reading the September issue since much of our progress is a result of your collective efforts and deserves to be acknowledged. I would like to express my appreciation to each judicial officer, and judicial and administrative staff for their personal and professional contributions toward *progress*.

Inside

- 2..... Around the Nation:
Remembering Katrina
- 3..... Around the State:
State Court Website
- 4-5..... Around the District:
Backpacks & Reading
Program
- 6..... Facilities Updates
- 7..... Training Opportunities
- 8..... Judicial Meetings
- 9..... Staff Meetings

Fourth Judicial District

Mission: To provide a system of Justice that assures equal access for the fair and timely resolution of cases and controversies.

Vision: To be recognized as providing an accessible, fair, courteous, efficient and innovative system of Justice.

A former Chancery court judge from Louisiana and an attorney from Gulfport share their thoughts of Hurricane Katrina one year later

Hurricane Katrina struck on August 29, 2005, leaving the landscapes and lives of Gulf Coast residents changed forever.

Now that one year has passed, the time has come to reflect on the those changes and the progress that has been made in the rebuilding process.

Progress in New Orleans has been slow. The Associated Press reported that only half the city has electricity, half the hospitals are still closed and less than half of the residents have returned. Housing continues to be a major issue as thousands of families still live in mobile homes or trailers with no timeline to move into permanent housing.

Co-author, Reilly Morse, [see box] provides legal support to hurricane victims by helping them navigate complex paperwork layers of insurance, loans, disaster assistance and grants; rebuild in compliance with tougher housing requirements; and secure consumer protection during the recovery process. Mr. Morse also extends legal support to secure neighborhoods from predatory developers; applies for historic preservation protections; and facilitates redevelopment partnerships on equitable terms. He also works to protect tenants' rights and ensure that new rental capacity is both affordable and compatible with the host communities.

Thank you for letting me understand homelessness, living without power, without television, without cool air in the heat;

Thank you for letting me understand hunger, the leisure of dry clean clothes and the relief of a place to sleep.

Thank you for letting me understand the deep and overwhelming sadness when forces, beyond our personal control, take the loved, the familiar, the usual.

Thank you for my needfulness and for my newfound empathy for those homeless before the storm and homeless now and for those hungry anywhere, for those in need everywhere.

Thank you for the opportunity you provided to help my neighbor, to be my brother's keeper, to serve food, to patch roofs, to clean yards, and to start mending that which was broken.

Thank you for the chance to change ourselves, for a reprieve from the normal, commercial day, for teaching us to make do, to get by, to improvise, for drowning our conceit, complacency, callousness, for silencing the noise, for stopping the clock, and for the chance to act our best when the worst occurred.

Thank you for the people who reached in, pulled out the living, cradled the dead, comforted the broken and torn apart, wept for the splintered and uprooted.

Thank you for the people who didn't wait to come right away, who opened their homes, who emptied their shelves, their closets, who cleaned, fed, healed, held us, who told us our spirit was amazing and who keep on coming.

Thank you for the people who measure their faith by their actions, and measure their actions by its consistency with their faith.

Thank you for all the people we have met, who are new friends, new loved ones, new brothers and sisters, new neighbors.

Thank you, KATRINA.

Not for the wind,
not for the water,
but for the appreciation of the things no storm can shatter,
no water can wash away,
no wind can move.

By: Tom Teel & Reilly Morse

Minnesota Judicial Branch unifies 12 websites

By Jamie Smith, Communications Assistant

Access to court information improved with the new state courts website implemented in June 2006. The Supreme Court, Court of Appeals and ten judicial districts are accessible under a new, simplified website address, www.mncourts.gov.

Among many user-friendly changes, the Self Help Center website offers the greatest statewide impact. All ten districts can refer pro se litigants to find forms, guidance on common legal problems, links to legal resources and email to a staff attorney. Katrina Zabinski, SHC Staff Attorney II, reported that "...court customers from around the world can submit their questions via email and the staff attorney will answer the questions the same as if the customer visited the SHC in person". The website offers customers access to services when it's most convenient to them.

"This kind of project takes a lot of minds and hands working together, and I think it came off really well. We will continue to upgrade and add new functions to the website as we go in our efforts to make this a place the public can go for easy access to the court system." says John Kostouros, Communications Director of the Minnesota Judicial Branch.

The website is a continuous "work in progress". Improvements will include customized home pages, all forms centrally located, and other enhancements. Links are underway for Spanish, Somali and Hmong resources; publishing more detailed information on landlord/tenant issues, Judgments, and civil lawsuits; and increasing access to automated forms such as I-CAN!, Divorce with Children, and In Forma Pauperis, spearheaded by Susan Ledray, Pro Se Services Manager.

The new website is proving to be a valuable tool in the courts' daily operations. As we become more familiar with the website, please encourage parties and justice partners to visit the new website as a 24/7 resource option.

www.mncourts.gov

What's online?

4th District

- **Directories**
- **Employment**
- **Fees**
- **Frequently requested services**
- **Hearing office**
- **Judges & Referees**
- **Jury Service**
- **Media & News**
- **Programs & Services**
- **Research Department**
- **Self Help Center**
- **Violations Bureau**

MN Judicial Branch

- **Calendars**
- **Courthouse Histories**
- **Forms**
- **Law Libraries**
- **Media Resource Center**
- **Opinions**
- **Public Notices**
- **Rules**
- **Teacher Resource Center**

Backpacks double

District Court's care for its community is evidenced by their response to the Backpack Challenge. An overwhelming 338 Hennepin County children attended their first day back at school with brand new backpacks loaded with pens, pencils, rulers, calculators and other tools for success. By helping students meet their most basic back-to-school needs, these children were able to greet the first day of school with confidence and readiness to learn. Your generosity turned an obstacle into a memorable milestone.

Staff nearly doubled last year's contributions. Backpacks and boxes stuffed with various school supplies were piled in an office, filling it completely waist high.

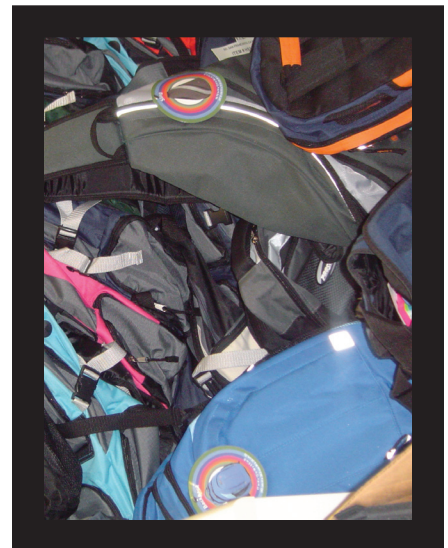
Hennepin County social workers, case managers, child support officers and other service providers submit the names of children needing backpacks. Rosemary Carpenter, annual Backpack Challenge program coordinator, oversees the pickup and distribution of backpacks to the children. This year, every child's backpack request was fulfilled.

In honor of the accomplishment, court staff celebrated with a casual attire day and a noontime Root Beer Float Social hosted by Human Resources and Judge Albrecht on August 29, 2006.

Please join me in thanking all the division site coordinators and Candace Albers of Human Resources for carrying out the logistics of this project.



An office full of backpacks



A more detailed look



At left: Tammie Davis (HR), Cherie Nelson (HR), Judge Albrecht make a float for Julie Nevison



At left: Candace Albers (HR), Cherie Nelson (HR), Judge Albrecht and Tim Kraus (HR) prepare a float for Steve Bittick (Probate/Mental Health)

Everybody Wins! seeks volunteers for 2006-2007 school year

By Jamie Smith, Communications Assistant

Judge Steven Pihlaja is again recruiting volunteers for the *Everybody Wins!* literacy program. Each Wednesday, at noon throughout the school year, volunteers read with third and fourth graders at the W. Harry Davis Academy in North Minneapolis.

Everybody Wins! improves children's prospects for success in life by pairing them with adult volunteers modeling their love of reading. Program volunteers stimulate children's interest in reading, encourage them to build their reading skills and demonstrate that they care about kids. The children show increased confidence, develop reading skills and perform better on tests. It's an *Everybody Wins!* situation where all involved enjoy benefits.

Since 2004, Judge Pihlaja has coordinated the logistics of the program. He recruits volunteers, works with teachers and school administration, assists with volunteer orientation and coordinates transportation. In previous years, volunteers traveled to the school from the HCGC by a yellow school bus. As of September 12, funding for the transportation has not been secured. "I am hoping to continue with or without the bus, but it will obviously be much more difficult for the readers if we are not able to obtain transportation," says Judge Pihlaja. He added that the Hennepin County Bar Association is currently reviewing the bus request.

The Fourth District recognizes the value of this program and provides training credit towards the annual twenty-four hour requirement of all staff.

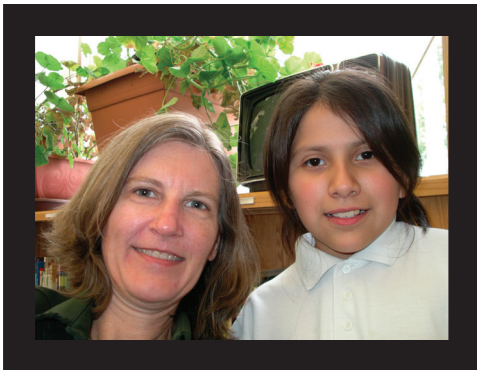
Interested volunteers may contact Judge Pihlaja by email at steven.pihlaja@courts.state.mn.us.



Students at a field trip to the HCGC in May 2006 coordinated by Melissa Giernoth, law clerk in Family Court



Students and volunteers at the end of the year pizza party at W. Harry Davis Academy in June 2006



Anna Lamb (MNCIS Business Analyst) with Abby, her 2005-06 student reading partner

"These are kids that fall through the cracks and struggle in school. Many have English as their second language and don't have parents who are available or able to give them that critical one-on-one reading attention at home that lays the foundation for their interest and future success in school. The first boy I read with didn't have a room, or a bed, but slept on the couch at his grandmother's home. From what little he shared, his home life seemed ever changing at best. I watched his confidence and reading skills grow a great deal over the course of the eight months I read with him."

-Anna Lamb

Facilities Update

In addition to moving three new judges and staff into chambers, the Facilities team is currently working on:

- VioP telephone conversion at Southdale and Brookdale Court Divisions
- C12 conference room remodel

Pending County Board approval, 2007 Capital Projects include:

- Juvenile Justice Center 1st and 2nd floors remodel
- Southdale Court Division front counter improvements
- HCGC and JJC courtroom communication systems upgrade
- furniture and space efficiency modifications
- Probate/Mental Health remodel
- C12 conversion to secure Administrative Floor
- C11 remodel of two courtrooms, chamber suites and counter area

Pandemic Flu Outbreak Information Available

The Fourth Judicial District is working closely with State Court Administration and Hennepin County to develop a pandemic flu plan. The plan will identify and coordinate the essential functions necessary to provide equal access and fair and timely resolution of cases in the event of a pandemic flu outbreak.

Hennepin County provides a web page with timely and accurate information on this issue.

http://www.co.hennepin.mn.us/vgn/portal/internet/hcchannelmaster/0,2324,1273_163174291__2,00.html

MNCIS training reminder

MNCIS overview training for law clerks and judicial clerks is offered twice a month.

-second Tuesdays from 9:30-11:30 a.m.

-fourth Thursdays from 12:30-2:30 p.m.

Advance registration is required due to limited space in the training room. Please contact Doris Karlisch, District Coordinator, at 612-348-9736 to schedule a training session.

GAL volunteer training sessions underway

The Fall 2006 day training session for volunteer Guardians ad Litem for Juvenile Court is currently underway.

There is still time to sign up to be a GAL volunteer for Juvenile Court. The Fall 2006 evening training session consists of 12 Monday and Thursday evenings:

-October: 12, 16, 19, 23, 26, 30

-November: 2, 6, 9, 13, 16, 20

Please contact the GAL Program staff if you, or someone you know, is interested in being a court-appointed GAL volunteer to speak out on behalf of a child's best interests.

Contact info: Sokunthea Soeun, GAL Staff Generalist
612-348-9827

JUDICIAL

Bench Meeting

Chief Judge Lucy Wieland
Agenda and Minutes: Deb Morse
1st Monday of Month
C2300, 12:15-1:30 p.m.

Bench and Bar

Judge TBA
4th Tuesday of Month
C957 or HCBA, 12:00-1:00 p.m.

Civil Committee

Judge Frank Connolly
Minutes: Lynn Fuchs
3rd Monday of Month
C1400, 12:15 p.m.

Criminal Committee

Judge Stephen Swanson
Minutes: Donna Badje
2nd Tuesday of Month
C1400, 12:15-1:30 p.m.

Criminal Justice Task Force

Judge Stephen Swanson
Minutes: Donna Badje
1st Wednesday of Month
A2300, 12:15 p.m.

Critical Issues

Marsha Unthank
Agenda: Deb Morse
1st and 3rd Tuesday of Month
C12, 12:15-1:30 p.m.

Drug Court Steering Committee

Judge Gary Larson
Quarterly Basis
C641, 7:30-9:00 a.m.

Equal Justice Committee

Judge Alexander
Minutes: Jamie Smith
4th Thursday of Month
JJC 3C, 12:15-1:30 p.m.

Executive Committee

Chief Judge Lucy Wieland
Agenda and Minutes: Deb Morse
2nd & 4th Wednesday of Month
C1400, 7:15-9:00 a.m.

Family Court Bench

Judge Bruce Peterson
4th Wednesday of Month
FJC172, 12:15-1:30 p.m.

Joint Committee on Community Corrections

Board/Bench
Chief Judge Lucy Wieland
1st Thursday of Month
C2300, 12:00 noon-1:30 p.m.

Juvenile Court Bench

Judge Tanya Bransford
3rd Thursday of Month
JJC 3A, 12:15-1:30 p.m.

Landlord/Tenant Bench and Bar

Referee Mark Labine
3rd Friday of Month
A1744 (*settlement rm*), 12:15-1:15 p.m.

Mental Health Court Committee

Judge Richard Hopper
Agenda and Minutes: Manette Chineth
1st Thursday of Month
C400, 12:15-1:30 p.m.

Presiding Judges

Agenda and Minutes: Deb Morse
4th Monday of Month
C1400, 12:15-1:30 p.m.

Public Trust & Confidence

Judge Kevin Burke
Minutes: Jamie Smith
4th Wednesday of Month
C1059, 12:15-1:30 p.m.

**To present
an item
to any of
these
committees,
please contact
the judge
or staff
member listed.**

(updated September 2006)

S T A F F

Administrative Staff Meeting

Mike Kelley
Agenda and Minutes: Cheri Sayre
2nd Tuesday of Month
C1400, 9:30-11:00 a.m.

Court Operations Managers

Katie Brey
3rd Thursday of Month
C400, 2:00-3:30 p.m.

Court Op. Leadworkers

Human Resources Specialist
4th Thursday of Month
C1400, 2:00-3:30 p.m.

Employee Appreciation & Recognition

Liz Dold & Amanda Bloodsaw
4th Tuesday of Month
C400, 7:30-9:00 a.m.

4th Ct Op. Supervisors

Jason Kujanen
1st Thursday of Month
C1257, 10:00-11:30 a.m.

Senior Admin Managers Team Meeting

Mike Kelley
Agenda & Minutes: Cheri Sayre
1st Thursday of Month
C1400, 8:30-10:00 a.m. &
3rd Wednesday of Month
C1400, 1:30-3:00 p.m.

**To present
an item
to any of
these
committees,
please contact
the judge
or staff
member listed.**

(updated September 2006)

Full Court Press Editorial Team: Mark Thompson, Nancy Peters & Jamie Smith

For comments or story ideas, please contact Jamie Smith at 612-596-9271 or email: jamie.smith@courts.state.mn.us